

LIEUT. ROBERT PLATT.

JANUARY 22, 1897.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House and ordered to be printed.

Mr. WILSON, of New York, from the Committee on Naval Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany S. 3150.]

The Committee on Naval Affairs, to whom was referred bill (H. R. 8744) authorizing the President to appoint Lieut. Robert Platt, United States Navy, to the rank of commander, having had the same under consideration, submit the following report:

A full and comprehensive history of the case of Lieutenant Platt is furnished in the report of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, presented to the Senate June 3, 1896. (Senate Report 1114). This report was made in connection with a bill of the Senate for the relief of Lieutenant Platt, which is identical in terms with the bill of the House, and which was unanimously passed by the Senate June 8, 1896, and is now before your committee. As the report of the Senate committee furnishes all the facts required for an intelligent understanding of Lieutenant Platt's case, it is adopted by your committee and made part of their report.

Your committee, desiring to ascertain the views of the Navy Department in regard to the merits of the bill, addressed a communication to the Secretary asking for his views thereon, and in reply the Secretary stated that in view of Lieutenant Platt's gallant conduct during the war of the rebellion, and of his faithful services since the war, the Department recommends the bill to the favorable consideration of the committee.

The letter of the Secretary of the Navy is herewith appended:

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
Washington, June 2, 1896.

SIR: Referring to the bill (H. R. 8744) "authorizing the President to appoint Lieut. Robert Platt, United States Navy, to the rank of commander," and to the Department's communication of the 10th ultimo, I inclose herewith a copy of the record of service of that officer, and, in reply to the committee's request for such views as the Department may entertain touching the merits of the bill in question, have to inform you that in view of the long and meritorious service of Mr. Platt in the volunteer navy, he was, by special act of Congress approved June 7, 1878, appointed an acting master in the United States Navy, and when, by virtue of the act of March 3, 1883, the grade of master was changed to that of lieutenant (junior grade) he became a lieutenant (junior grade). Mr. Platt is now the only commissioned officer on the active list not in the line of promotion.

In view of Lieutenant Platt's gallant conduct during the war of the rebellion, and of his faithful service since the war, and in view also of the fact that he will, if the

bill becomes a law, be retired, by virtue of age, on the 14th of March, 1897, to which privilege he would not otherwise be entitled (vide section 1445 of the Revised Statutes), the Department recommends the bill in question to the favorable consideration of the committee.

Very respectfully,

H. A. HERBERT, *Secretary.*

The CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON NAVAL AFFAIRS,
House of Representatives.

As the bill passed by the Senate on June 8, 1896, is identical with the bill of the House, your committee recommend that the bill of the Senate (S. 3150) be substituted for that of the House, and that the Senate bill be passed. Your committee further recommend that the House bill (H. R. 8744) be laid on the table.

The report of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, to which reference has already been made and approval given, is herewith appended and made part of this report.

[Senate Report No. 1114, Fifty-fourth Congress, first session.]

The Committee on Naval Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (S. 3150) authorizing the President to appoint Lieut. Robert Platt, United States Navy, to the rank of commander, having had the same under consideration, beg leave to submit the following report:

The committee recommend the passage of the bill for the reasons set forth in the following statement of facts:

Robert Platt is borne on the Navy Register as "lieutenant, junior grade, not in line of promotion." This case is unique. After thirty-three years' service in the Navy, which includes service during the rebellion that gained honorable mention and high commendation from Admiral Du Pont and other naval officers under whom he served, Lieutenant Platt stands at the foot of the junior officers of the grade held by him, the seniors of whom were not born when he was serving with the fleet of Admiral Du Pont in the attack upon Charleston.

Born in North Carolina in 1835, Lieutenant Platt went to sea at an early age, and was trained in that maritime school that has given so many distinguished men to the American merchant and naval marine. Upon the breaking out of the rebellion Lieutenant Platt was a prosperous skipper, with thorough knowledge of his business, and familiar with the Southern coast and harbors. Tempting offers from representatives of the Confederate States and the appeals of relatives and old associates were unavailing to induce him to abandon allegiance to the United States.

For a short time prior to the breaking out of the rebellion Lieutenant Platt was in the service of the United States Coast Survey as first master mate and executive officer of the steamer *Bibb*. His services with the Coast Survey were of a character to secure for him the highest commendation of the chief officers thereof, and the experience acquired by him while on that duty made him a specially valuable man to the naval forces operating against the harbors and seaport cities of the Confederacy.

When hostilities commenced in 1861 the vessels of the Coast Survey were turned over to the Revenue-Marine Service and became an auxiliary force of the Navy. Appreciating the ability and loyalty of Lieutenant Platt, his superior officers earnestly recommended his appointment as lieutenant in the Revenue Marine. The following letters show the estimation in which Lieutenant Platt was held:

NORFOLK, VA., April 9, 1861.

SIR: Mr. Robert Platt is deserving of receiving a commission in the Revenue Service, and I take great pleasure in joining his friends in recommending him for the place. He served with me as senior master mate and executive officer of the surveying steamer *Bibb* for a number of years, and besides his competency, of which I can not speak too highly, he is a gentleman in his manner, habits, and associations; he is also strictly moral, and his appointment would, in my opinion, secure to that service a ready-made and efficient officer.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

A. MURRAY,
Lieutenant Commanding, United States Navy.

The SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY.

UNITED STATES STEAMER BIBB,
Perth Amboy, May 1, 1861.

DEAR SIR: I beg leave to introduce to your favorable notice Mr. Robert Platt, the chief officer of this vessel, who has been connected with the Coast Survey for some years, during which time he has become acquainted with our harbors and coast.

These vessels are now to be turned over to the Revenue Service, when Mr. Platt must be thrown out of employment, should he not receive what he is desirous of obtaining, "an appointment as lieutenant in the Revenue Service." Mr. Platt is a native of North Carolina. "His love of the flag" is stronger than that of the "States-right doctrine," owing to which he is unable to return to his native State to battle for the Union.

Under these circumstances, and the fact that he has such high testimonials as to character and qualifications, I have been induced to ask that you would be pleased to assist him with your influence to obtain the desired situation.

I would not presume to ask this was I not confident that the Government would in this, her time of need, obtain a most valuable servant.

Respectfully, yours,

N. C. BLAKE,
Lieutenant Commanding, United States Navy.

Hon. W. V. BRADY.

Lieutenant Platt remained with the revenue-marine steamer *Bibb* as executive officer until March, 1863, when he was appointed acting ensign in the Navy by Admiral Du Pont, for reasons that are set forth in the following letter:

[Dispatch No. 153, 1863.]

FLAGSHIP WABASH,
Port Royal Harbor, S. C., March 26, 1863.

SIR: I have the honor to inform the Department that I have appointed Robert Platt, at present executive officer of the United States Coast Survey steamer *Bibb*, as acting ensign in the United States Navy from the 1st of March, this being the highest appointment I can offer.

I would, however, recommend that the Department should give him the appointment of acting master from the same date. Mr. Platt has been of great service in this squadron, is an educated and thorough seaman, and is, moreover, to pilot the fleet into Charleston Harbor, as I have reason to believe that his knowledge of the channel exceeds that of any of the few pilots we have here, and for which perilous service he has patriotically volunteered.

I may add that there are two other pilots in the squadron holding the position of acting master, which is a further reason for making the appointment.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. F. DU PONT,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Hon. GIDEON WELLES,
Secretary of the Navy, Washington, D. C.

Lieutenant Platt led Admiral Du Pont's fleet into the harbor of Charleston on April 1, 1863, his vessel leading the fleet and under the fire of the enemy's shore batteries. For his skill, coolness, and intrepidity, Lieutenant Platt was specially commended by Admiral Du Pont. In acknowledgment of his services upon that occasion Mr. Platt was advanced to the grade of acting master, his appointment coming from Admiral Du Pont with the following letter:

FLAGSHIP WABASH,
Port Royal, S. C., April 14, 1863.

SIR: I have the pleasure to inclose your appointment as acting master in the United States Navy, and you will report to Captain Boutelle in that capacity and continue your previous duties on the *Bibb*.

I avail myself of the occasion to express my commendation of your pilotage of the *Weehawken*, the leading ship in the attack on the Charleston ports, on the 1st of April, under my own observation, and which has been alluded to by Capt. J. Rodgers in the most favorable terms in his official report.

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

S. F. DU PONT,
Rear-Admiral, Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Acting Master ROBERT PLATT,
U. S. S. *Bibb*, Port Royal, S. C.

The following extract from the official report of Captain Rodgers, to which reference is made in the foregoing letter of Admiral Du Pont, shows the value of Lieutenant Platt's services upon the occasion referred to:

INSIDE OF CHARLESTON BAR, S. C., April 8, 1863.

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All the officers and men behaved so admirably that I am unable to select one for especial commendation. I am much indebted to Mr. Robert Platt, of the United States Coast Survey steamer *Bibb*, for his cool and efficient pilotage of the vessel, which he continued to direct after a ball touching the pilot house immediately over his head had given him a severe concussion. * * *

I have the honor to be, your obedient servant,

JOHN RODGERS, Captain.

Rear-Admiral S. F. DU PONT,
Commanding South Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Mr. Platt remained on duty with the blockading fleet until the termination of the war, performing such service as was assigned him. When the war closed Mr. Platt, upon the application of Carlisle Patterson, then Chief of the Coast Survey, was assigned to that service. He remained with the Coast Survey for several years, being continued in the Navy as a volunteer officer. June 15, 1878, an act was passed by Congress making Mr. Platt master in the Navy, not in the line of promotion. By the act of March 3, 1883, the grade of master was abolished and the grade of junior lieutenant established. Although there was no specific reference to Master Platt in that act, he was continued on the Navy Register as "Lieutenant, junior grade, not in line of promotion." It is a question whether, by the act of March 3, 1883, Mr. Platt did not become a lieutenant, junior grade, without limitation.

During all these years Mr. Platt has continued to serve the Government with efficiency and fidelity. For some time past he has been in command of the United States Fish Commission steamer *Fish Hawk*, and has performed valuable service in connection with the propagation of food-fish and in obtaining information touching their nature and habits. With thirty-three years' service in the Navy, of which over twenty years have been sea service, and three of which were during the war, he is still a junior lieutenant. He asks, in view of his long and faithful service and of the fact that he will reach the age of 62 in March, 1897, the age at which officers above the grade of lieutenant are retired, that Congress pass an act authorizing his appointment to the grade of commander, not in the line of promotion, to the end that he may, upon reaching the age of 62, be retired with that grade.

It may be urged that this is an unusual request, but it can be truthfully said that this is not only an unusual case but one without precedent, and one which is not likely to again be presented. Mr. Platt was granted admission to the Navy with a limitation as to promotion which had to be acquiesced in in order to overcome the opposition of those who would be affected by his full admission. Had he been admitted without limitation he would have attained the grade of commander before reaching the age for retirement, and in the intervening years would have been in the enjoyment of the additional pay that attaches to the grades above that which has been continually held by him. Lieutenant Platt's long and faithful services justify him in asking Congress to give him the measure of relief asked for, and the fact that Lieutenant Platt remained loyal to the Government at a time when men of his abilities and special equipment were offered liberal inducements to accept service from the Confederacy; that he abandoned his home and severed the bonds which united him to kindred and friends, and voluntarily offered his services to maintain the integrity of the Union, should be given consideration in this connection.

The sacrifices made by those men of Southern birth who remained loyal to the Government have been frequently recognized by Congress and the Executive in individual cases. Special recognition was given this class of citizens by Congress in the act of August 15, 1876, by which it was provided that commodores in the Navy "who, being at the outbreak of the late rebellion citizens of any State which engaged in such rebellion, exhibited marked fidelity to the Union in adhering to the flag of the United States," should, upon retirement, be retired with the grade of rear-admiral. If special recognition should be the reward of naval officers under the conditions described in the act above quoted, surely the citizen under like conditions, who was free from the moral and legal obligations resting upon the naval officer to remain loyal to his flag, is deserving of equal recognition from Congress.

The advancement of Lieutenant Platt to the grade of commander, not in the line of promotion, would not affect any officer on the Naval Register, and would involve to the Government a comparatively trifling expenditure, and that only for a very limited period. It would be a fitting recognition of long and faithful services and would enable an old and faithful officer, whose life has been passed in the public service, to maintain himself and family during the few years that remain to him.

MARINE BARRACKS,
Navy-Yard, Boston, Mass., April 21, 1896.

This is to certify that Mr. Robert Platt (now Lieut. Robert Platt, United States Navy) and I served together on coast-survey duty on the coast of Maine in 1861, just after the outbreak of the war. Mr. Platt was then the sailing master of the schooner *Arago*, which vessel was temporarily detached from coast-survey duty and armed by orders of the Government at Washington, with orders to cruise on that coast, prevent arms and munitions of war being sent by sea to the rebels, and one especial order was to cruise for and capture four rebel vessels which were reported to have run the blockade at New Orleans. The names of these vessels were *Alice Ball*, *Orozimbo*, *Express*, and *Peter Marcy*. Through the active efforts and good judgment of Captain Platt, three of these ships were captured. Captain Platt himself brought the *Alice Ball* into Eastport (Me.) Harbor with the rebel flag union down and our flag above it. A large party in Eastport was at that time unfriendly to the Government, and often threats were made that they would take the three captured ships (*Alice Ball*, *Express*, and *Orozimbo*) from us, but Captain Platt's vigilance and the excellent discipline he had in force in his command prevented any such action on the part of the citizens of the town, and the vessels were retained until delivered to other officials of the Government.

ROBT. L. MEADE,
Major, United States Marine Corps.

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